

PICASSO/CHANEL

11 October 2022 to 15 January 2023

Curator: Paula Luengo

"Chanel is to fashion what Picasso is to painting", Jean Cocteau

The Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza is presenting an exhibition that explores the relationship between two of the 20th century's great creative figures: Pablo Picasso and Gabrielle Chanel, once again bringing art and fashion together in this new exhibition project. Picasso and Chanel collaborated professionally on two occasions, both with Jean Cocteau: on the play *Antigone* (1922), and on Serge Diaghilev's ballet *Le Train Bleu* (1924). They met in the spring of 1917, probably through Cocteau or Misia Sert. Chanel formed close and long-lasting friendships with both Cocteau and Misia who introduced her to Picasso's circle and she socialised with the artist and his wife at a time when he was actively involved in Diaghilev's company, the Ballets Russes. She became closely associated with the Parisian artistic and intellectual world of the day, to the extent of declaring that "I learned rigor from artists." (*)

The exhibition *Picasso/Chanel* is curated by Paula Luengo, head of the Department of Exhibitions at the museum. It benefits from the support of the Comunidad de Madrid and of CHANEL, in addition to Telefónica/ACE, sponsors of the *Picasso Celebration 1973-2023*. The exhibition brings together an exceptional selection of garments, oil paintings, drawings and other items, loaned from American and European museums as well as private collections and with the notably generous collaboration of Almine and Bernard Ruiz-Picasso, Patrimoine de CHANEL and the Musée national Picasso-Paris.

(*) *Coco Chanel. Un parfum de mystère*, Isabelle Fiemeyer, 1999, Paris. Éditions Payot & Rivages "La plaque d'ébène", p.146

Images, from left to right: Gabrielle Chanel. *Evening Dress*, 1929-30. Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris. © CHANEL; Pablo Picasso, *Seated Woman in a Chemise*, 1923. Tate. Bequeathed by C. Frank Stoop, 1933 © Succession Pablo Picasso, VEGAP, Madrid, 2022; Pablo Picasso. *Woman with a Mandolin*, 1908. © Succession Pablo Picasso, VEGAP, Madrid, 2022 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf; Gabrielle Chanel. *Coat*, 1929-1930. Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris. © CHANEL

More information and images:

Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza. Paseo del Prado, 8. 28014 Madrid. Tel. +34 914203944 / +34 913600236.

prensa@museothyssen.org

<https://www.museothyssen.org/en/private-area/press/dossiers/picasso-and-chanel>

Exhibition organized with the support of the National Commission for the Commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the death of the Spanish artist Pablo Picasso and with the exceptional support of

Partner company in Spain

With the support of

With the collaboration

The exhibition is organised into four major sections that proceed in chronological order, approximately spanning the second and third decades of the 20th century, from 1910 to 1930:

Cubism and the style of Chanel presents the influence of that movement on the couturière's work, which is evident from her earliest, innovative designs. Cubism's geometrical formal language, its chromatic reduction and its poetic of collage are translated into clothes with straight, angular lines and into her preference for blocks of colour, for black, white and beige and for the use of simple fabrics.

Olga Picasso, the second section, focuses on the numerous and beautiful portraits that Picasso painted of his first wife, the Russian ballerina Olga Khokhlova, a loyal client of Chanel's. Shown alongside them are dresses from the designer's initial period, of which only a few survived.

Antigone was Cocteau's modern adaptation of Sophocles' play, which premiered in Paris in 1922 with sets and masks by Picasso and costume designs by Chanel. They are reunited in this section in order to show how both creators were inspired by classical Greece.

Le Train Bleu, the exhibition's fourth section, is the title of the ballet produced by Diaghilev in 1924, with a libretto by Cocteau inspired by sport and bathing fashion. *Two Women Running on the Beach (The Race)*, a small gouache that Diaghilev spotted in Picasso's studio, became the image for the stage curtain, while Chanel, herself a keen sportswoman, designed costumes for the dancers, inspired by the sport outfits she created for herself and for her clients.



Pablo Picasso. *Two Women Running on the Beach (The Race)*, 1922. Musée national Picasso-Paris. Acceptance in lieu, 1979. ©RMN Grand Palais (Musée national Picasso-Paris) © Mathieu Rabeau © Succession Pablo Picasso, VEGAP, Madrid, 2022.

"Chanel - above all else, is a style. Fashion, you see, goes out of fashion. Style never." Gabrielle Chanel (*Chanel and her World: Friends, Fashion and Fame*, Edmonde Charles-Roux)



Madame D'Ora. *Portrait of Gabrielle Chanel*. Musée national Picasso-Paris, Gift of the Succession Picasso, 1992. ©RMN-Grand Palais (Musée national Picasso-Paris) © image RMN-GP

"[Picasso] destroyed but then he constructed. He arrived in Paris in 1900 when I was a child, already able to draw like Ingres, whatever Sert said. I'm almost old and Picasso is still working; he has become the radioactive principle of painting. Our meeting could only have happened in Paris." Gabrielle Chanel (*The Allure of Chanel*, Paul Morand)

Chanel and Picasso met in the spring of 1917 when the two were in their thirties and were already famous in their respective professional fields. Picasso was becoming one of the most highly sought-after painters in Paris while Chanel, who had started out as a milliner, had triumphed as a fashion designer, opening shops in Paris (1910), Deauville (1912) and Biarritz (1915). Her natural intuition and insatiable desire to learn led her to surround herself with musicians, writers and painters whose creations fascinated her. She also became a patron, financially assisting Stravinsky, the poet Pierre Reverdy and Jean Cocteau on different occasions.

However, it was after the outbreak of World War I that she achieved real fame due to the new presence of women in the workplace, resulting in a need for more practical clothes for them. Chanel opted for a loose, unbelted style, shortening her dresses for greater ease of movement, adding large, practical pockets and eliminating any unnecessary ornamentation. None of these

changes, however, resulted in any loss of elegance. In some cases, she was inspired by male clothing, and she even made the short bob, *à la garçonne*, fashionable.

Chanel's work is defined by its constant reinvention of typologies and forms, functioning outside pre-established limits and moving towards a lesser dependence on classic dressmaking techniques, which was a decisive shift in couture.

The break brought about by the artistic avant-gardes' representation of reality through non-visual values is comparable to the change that Chanel introduced into ways of dressing, resulting in a new style that went beyond a formal transformation in female fashion in the sense that it implied a change of register in the codes of representation of the image of clothing.

Direct comparison between Chanel's designs and the work of Picasso reveals their formal relationship and the profound ties that connect their respective creations, the result of shared aspirations and influences and of their mutual



admiration, with both contributing to the construction of the modern paradigm. Chanel created the "uniform" of the modern, dynamic 20th century woman while Picasso formulated a new canon of visual beauty that became his style. Chanel understood that he had defined the traits of a new classicism, a language which, although synonymous with modernity, would never go out of fashion.



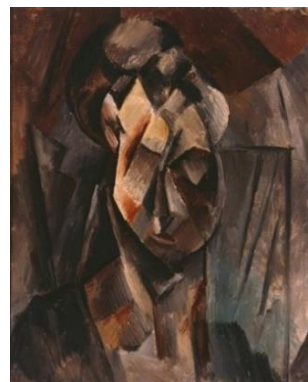
Gabrielle Chanel.
Ensemble, 1926-1928.
Patrimoine de CHANEL,
Paris. © CHANEL

Pablo Picasso. *Harlequin with a Mirror*, 1923. Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid. © photographs Hélène Desplechin, Humberto Durán © Succession Pablo Picasso, VEGAP, Madrid, 2022. Gabrielle Chanel. *Day Dress*, ca. 1922 Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kunstgewerbemuseum © Kunstgewerbemuseum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin

1. Cubism and the style of Chanel

"Simple", "pure" and "precise" are terms that were widely employed by the fashion press in the early decades of the 20th century to describe the avant-garde in dress and also in the visual and performing arts, music and architecture. From 1910 it is possible to refer to Cubist-inspired fashion in the work of various designers who preceded Chanel, such as Callot Sœurs or Lucile, who translated the new aesthetic created by Braque and Picasso to clothing.

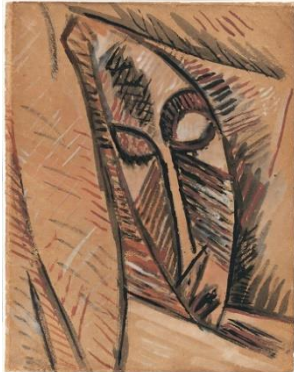
To achieve the simultaneous representation of the different viewpoints of an object, Picasso initiated a mental process which involved positioning himself in every possible relationship with that object, seeing it from all angles at the same time. Chanel's approach to dress also implies a coherent approach to human beings' constantly changing interactions. Clothing



Pablo Picasso. *Woman's Head (Fernande)*, 1909-1910. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid. ©MNCARS. © Succession Pablo Picasso, VEGAP, Madrid, 2022. Gabrielle Chanel. *Dress*, ca. 1926. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kunstgewerbemuseum © Kunstgewerbemuseum – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, SPK / Stephan Klonk

establishes a dialogue with gesture and with the movement of the body and of other garments and thus ceases to be static.

Like Cubism, Chanel explored **the straight line and composition** through planes. The silhouette she proposed tended to verticality and to the suppression of the sinuous lines and volumetric forms of the



Pablo Picasso. *Study for the Head of "Nude with Drapery"*, 1907. Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid. © photographs Hélène Desplechin, Humberto Durán © Succession Pablo Picasso, VEGAP, Madrid, 2022. Gabrielle Chanel, *Day Dress*, 1920. Modemuseum Hasselt © Modemuseum Hasselt/Kristof Vrancken



Belle Époque, opting for a reduction in ornamentation, the gradual elimination of the waistline and bust in order to achieve a synthetic reading of the body. She also abandoned the bright colours of the previous era and replaced them **with an austere palette** that echoes the experiences of Analytical Cubism. Beige, blues and whites and the black/white pairing became her most habitual tones. Photography, film, and jazz culture made this combination a symbol of everything modern.

Chanel saw the dress as a plane on which to arrange the accessories - long necklaces, bracelets, printed scarves, etc - which added striking colour contrasts so that their visual value is heightened against the background just as in Synthetic Cubism.

Her interest in jersey and cotton, traditionally considered humble textiles, can also be associated with the Cubist aesthetic of the use of **poor materials** and of the everyday object that allows for direct contact with reality. Chanel made fabrics associated with underwear fashionable, as well as the rough texture of Scottish tweed, relatively untreated woollen fabrics and modest furs. In both her work and in Cubism this choice reflects the explicit intention to avoid distractions. For Chanel, knitted fabric was a means to refine the composition, work with planes and reveal the structure of the dress; it was the material that obliged her to progressively simplify the forms. By renouncing volume and working with planes, the dress functioned as a canvas on which to develop the syntax of elements, with tactile values prevailing over visual ones. Both the technique of **collage** and of assemblage find their counterpart in the unique combinations of textiles that Chanel introduced, mixing knitted fabric with the use of muslin and furs.

2. Olga Picasso

"I had to hold a gold crown over Olga's head; it seemed like we were all performing 'Boris Godunov'. The ceremony was lovely, a real wedding with mysterious rituals and hymns. Lunch afterwards at the Meurice. Misia in sky blue, Olga in white satin, wool and net - very Biarritz."
Letter from Jean Cocteau to his mother.

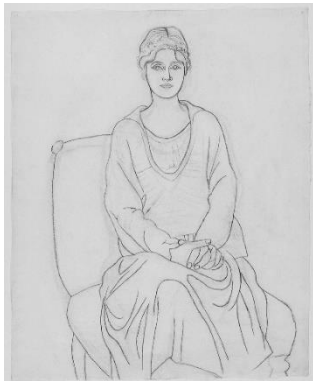
Picasso and Olga Khokhlova were married in Paris in July 1918. They had met in Rome in early 1917 while Picasso was working on the sets of *Parade*, an avant-garde production by Diaghilev's celebrated Ballets Russes, the company that Olga had joined as a ballerina in 1911. Jean Cocteau was a witness at the wedding and very probably the bride's dress was designed by Chanel. After the ceremony Olga and Picasso moved to Biarritz where she recovered from an operation on her leg while Picasso focused on his work, which was evolving towards a more decorative Cubism, while also producing numerous portraits of his wife



Pablo and Olga Picasso sitting in the Covent Garden studios, 1919
Musée national Picasso-Paris, Gift of the Succession Picasso, 1992, Pablo Picasso personal archive. ©RMN Grand Palais (Musée national Picasso-Paris) © Mathieu Rabeau

whom he faithfully depicted in the intimacy of their home in pensive poses, reading, writing or sewing. The dresses that Olga is wearing in many of these paintings clearly reveal Chanel's *chic* style with its linear, simple and very flattering cut.

Despite the war, the small coastal city of Biarritz became a centre of intense activity and social life. Chanel had opened one of her branches there in 1915 opposite the Casino and her clients included the numerous foreigners and Parisians residing in the city. She soon became a favourite designer of Olga, who according to Stravinsky owned a large number of her dresses. This is also evident in surviving home snapshots and amateur films, some of which are included in the exhibition.



Pablo Picasso. *Olga with Garland of Flowers*. 1920. Musée national Picasso-Paris. Gift of Jacqueline Picasso ©RMN-Grand Palais (Musée national Picasso-Paris) ©Madeleine Coursaget. © Succession Pablo Picasso, VEGAP, Madrid, 2022.
Gabrielle Chanel. *Day Dress*, ca. 1925-1926. Stiftung August Ohm, Hamburg.



Olga must have felt liberated and comfortable with Chanel's relaxed designs and it would seem that she was a devotee of her creations even before her marriage to Picasso. These comfortable clothes, adapted to the movement of the body, were governed by the same principles as early modern dance.

Unfortunately, very few of them have survived but the exhibition does include a number of creations by Chanel from that period which establish a perfect dialogue with Olga's dresses and her style, as seen in the magnificent portraits of her on display. These include *Portrait of Olga Khokhlova* (1917) from the Fondation Marie Anne Poniowski Krugier, *Portrait of Olga with fur Collar* (1923) from the Fundación Almine y Bernard Ruiz-Picasso para

el Arte, Madrid, and the charcoal drawing *Olga with Garland of Flowers* (1920) from the Musée national Picasso-Paris, on loan to the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lille.

3. *Antigone*

In the summer of 1922, Jean Cocteau wrote a shortened version of Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone* which would be the first professional project involving both Picasso and Chanel. It premiered in December that year at the Théâtre de L'Atelier in Montmartre, directed by Charles Dullin and with an extremely experimental stage design. Picasso was responsible for the sets: an ultramarine sky and Doric columns painted on a cloth using violet, blue and ochre tones to create a surprising but effective backdrop. He also made the chorus's masks and the guards' shields, which are decorated with motifs inspired by classical Greek vases.

In contrast to the large stages of the theatres in which the Ballets Russes had performed and for which Picasso had previously produced designs, in the case of *Antigone* he had to work with a very restricted space and limited theatrical effects, which gave him the chance to experiment. This project coincided with the "return to order" period when he painted an important group of works that depict monumental nude or semi-nude female figures in white tunics. These are figures of solid forms and sculptural modelling and with hair styles, facial features, tunics and drapery that refer to classical



Gabrielle Chanel. *Evening Dress*, 1923-1926. Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris. © CHANEL; Pablo Picasso. *Three Women by a Fountain*, 1921. Private collection, courtesy Tobias Mueller Modern Art, Zürich © Succession Pablo Picasso, VEGAP, Madrid, 2022.

antiquity, but which are simultaneously a-temporal. Picasso played with distorting the figures, making them slimmer or exaggerating the size of the hands and feet, often using Olga as his model.

Three Women by a Fountain (1921), *Seated Woman* (1921), and *The Three Graces* (1923) are among the examples on display in this gallery, shown alongside studies for the sets of the production, three portraits of Picasso by Cocteau, and the only known depiction of Antigone, on a Greek vase of around 390-380 BC loaned by the British Museum. During his first trip to London in May and June 1919, Picasso carefully studied the classical works of art on display at that museum.



Antigone report in Vogue (detail). French edition, February 1, 1923. Julien Morrás Azpiazu Collection

February 10th 1923 for the Gazette of the Arts, Cocteau says: “[...] I requested costumes from Mademoiselle Chanel because she is the greatest dressmaker of our age and I do not imagine Oedipus’s daughters as being poorly dressed.” Chanel was responsible for the costume designs, and she was delighted to accept the project, knowing that Picasso was also involved. She looked to archaic Greece to create costumes in thick Scottish woollen cloth in tones of brown and ecru with occasional touches of brick red that harmonised with the set and the other props and also faithfully followed the colour range chosen by Picasso. The diadems with inset semi-precious stones worn by the principal characters are considered to be her first jewellery designs. This initial foray into the theatre on her part was extremely successful and her work was highly praised by the specialist press: “*Chanel goes Greek but continues to be Chanel*”.

Sadly, none of the original costumes from 1922 have survived. The exhibition includes various models of clearly classical inspiration, particularly evening gowns.

4. *Le Train Bleu*

Picasso and Chanel’s second and final professional collaboration took place in 1924 with *Le Train Bleu*, a one-act ballet produced by Diaghilev, again with a libretto by Jean Cocteau, which premiered in June at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris. The idea of creating a ballet that combined pantomime, acrobatic acts, music and satire occurred to Cocteau after he saw the British dancer Anton Dolin performing a series of acrobatics. His idea was to create a modern, fun work inspired by activities that were fashionable in the early 1920s, such as sunbathing and sport (the Olympic Games were held in Paris that summer) involving cosmopolitan characters of the type who regularly used the Train bleu, the luxury night train that connected Paris with the Côte d’Azur and which gave the ballet its name.

The score was commissioned from the composer Darius Milhaud, the choreography from Bronislava Nijinska and the set design from the Cubist sculptor Henri Laurens, a follower of Braque and Picasso who produced a light-hearted beach set with angular bathing huts and twisted beach umbrellas. Once again Chanel was asked to design the costumes. Cocteau’s idea was that rather than being theatrical, they should be extremely elegant and up to date, for which reason Chanel creates costumes for the dancers, inspired by the sport outfits she created for herself and for her clients, resulting in some cases in practical problems as they were not specifically intended for dancing.



Le Train Bleu: Léon Woizikovsky, Lydia Sokolova, Bronislava Nijinska and Anton Dolin, 1924. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C, Music Division. Pablo Picasso. *The Bathers*, 1918. Musée national Picasso-Paris. Acceptance in lieu, 1979. ©RMN Grand Palais (Musée national Picasso-Paris) © Sylvie Chan-Liat © Succession Pablo Picasso, VEGAP, Madrid, 2022

A month prior to the first night, Diaghilev came across the gouache *Two Women Running on the Beach* (*The Race*) in Picasso's studio and asked if he could use it for the front cloth. The artist accepted and he also illustrated the programme for the Ballet Russes's 1924 season. Shown alongside that iconic painting are related works such as *Woman by the Sea* (1922) and *Seated Woman in a Chemise* (1924), as well as *The Bathers* (1918), a small masterpiece that Picasso kept throughout his life depicting modern women wearing swimsuits very similar to those that Chanel would use years later for the dancers in this production. The costumes displayed in the exhibition are reproductions of the originals, made by the Opéra de Paris for the 1992 production of *Le Train Bleu*.

ASSOCIATED ACTIVITIES

From 6 November to 11 December the museum is presenting a film cycle comprising a selection of titles that focus on these two artists. They include films for which Chanel designed the costumes, such as *Tonight or Never* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1931) and *The Rules of the Game* (Jean Renoir, 1939), as well as *Coco Chanel & Igor Stravinsky* (Jan Kounen, 2009) and the recent *Correspondances: Jean Cocteau-Pablo Picasso* (Dorothée Lachaud, 2020), which together allow for a reassessment of these two artists from the starting point of different genres. The cycle also includes two shorts on Chanel made by Karl Lagerfeld and a special showing of *Picasso and Dance: Le Train Bleu/Le Tricorne*, which includes the performance of the ballet of the exhibition's final section.

PICASSO CELEBRATION 1973-2023

April 8, 2023 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Spanish artist Pablo Picasso and thus the year will represent the celebration of his work and his artistic legacy in France, Spain and internationally.

The French and Spanish governments wanted to carry out this large-scale transnational event through a binational commission, bringing together the cultural and diplomatic administrations of the two countries.

The Picasso Celebration 1973-2023 revolves around some fifty exhibitions and events that will be held in renowned cultural institutions in Europe and North America, and which together will draw up a historiographical survey of approaches to Picasso's work. The commemoration, punctuated by official celebrations in France and Spain, will shine a light on the research and understanding of Picasso's work, notably during a major international symposium in autumn 2023, at the time of the opening of the Center for Picasso Studies in Paris.

The Musée national Picasso-Paris and the Spanish National Commission for the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the death of Pablo Picasso are pleased to support this exceptional programme.

EXHIBITION INFORMATION

Title: *Picasso/Chanel*.

Organiser: Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza.

With the collaboration: Comunidad de Madrid y CHANEL.

Sponsorship of *Picasso Celebration 1973/2023*: Telefónica/ACE.

Venue and dates: Madrid, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, 11 October 2022 to 15 January 2023.

Curator: Paula Luengo, curator and head of the Department of Exhibitions, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza.

Technical curator: Leticia de Cos, curator in the Department of Exhibitions, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza.

Number of works: Picasso: 67; Chanel: 52.

Publications: Catalogue with texts by Paula Luengo, Marika Genty, Juan Gutiérrez, Maria Spitz and Birgit Haase, Dominique Marny and Lynn Garafola.

VISITOR INFORMATION

Address: Paseo del Prado, 8. 28014, Madrid. Temporary exhibition galleries, ground floor.

Opening times: Tuesdays to Sundays, 10 am to 7 pm; Saturdays, 10 am to 9 pm. Closed Mondays.

Exceptional opening until 10 pm:

- Saturdays (except December 24 and 31).
- Friday, from November 11 to January 6 (except November 18 and December 16).
- Holidays (except December 25 and January 1).
- From December 6 to 10.
- Christmas: from December 27 to 30 and from January 3 to 7.

Ticket prices: Combined ticket: Permanent collection and temporary exhibitions.

- Standard ticket: 13 €

- Reduced Price ticket: 9 € for visitors aged over 65, pensioners and students with proof of status.

Groups (7 or more people): 11 € per person.

- Free entry: visitors aged under 18, officially unemployed Spanish citizens, disabled visitors, Large Families, currently employed teachers and holders of the Youth Card and the European Youth Card.

Advance ticket purchase at the museum's ticket desks, from its website and on tel: (+ 34) 91 7911370.

More information: www.museothyssen.org

PRESS INFORMATION

<https://www.museothyssen.org/en/private-area/press/dossiers/picasso-and-chanel>